

Oregano

Definition: [oh-rehg-uh-noh] Greek for "joy of the mountain," oregano was almost unheard of in the United States until soldiers came back from Italian World War II assignments raving about it. This herb, sometimes called wild marjoram, belongs to the mint family and is related to both marjoram and thyme. Oregano is similar to marjoram but is not as sweet and has a stronger, more pungent flavor and aroma. Because of its pungency, it requires a bit more caution in its use. Mediterranean oregano is milder than the Mexican variety, which is generally used in highly spiced dishes. Fresh Mediterranean or European oregano is sometimes available in gourmet produce sections of supermarkets and in Italian or Greek markets. Choose bright-green, fresh-looking bunches with no sign of wilting or yellowing. Refrigerate in a plastic bag for up to 3 days. Dried Mediterranean oregano is readily available in any supermarket in both crumbled and powdered forms. The stronger-flavored Mexican oregano can generally be found in its dried form in Latin markets. As with all dried herbs, oregano should be stored in a cool, dark place for no more than 6 months. Oregano goes extremely well with tomato-based dishes and is a familiar pizza herb.